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House of Representatives

REQUESTING BENEFITS FOR WORLD WAR II FILIPINO VETERANS

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, I thank the chairman for allowing me to take a few minutes on this amendment. As we are very much concerned with our Iraqi and Afghanistan young men and women who are returning with grave injuries, we cannot forget our older veterans and the justices that we have to make up for.

We can go back to World War II where we have atomic veterans who have not yet received compensation for being in testing areas without being told. We have merchant mariners who never got benefits of our GI Bill, who are in their eighties and we need to say thank you to.

We have a group of veterans who were drafted into the Army in 1941, all the Filipinos who were in the Filipino army and various units and various irregular areas defending that territory. That was a territory of ours. And we drafted all the soldiers into our Army with the promise that they would have benefits later.

Those Filipino soldiers, over a quarter million of them, held up the Japanese advance for weeks and weeks and weeks beyond their scheduled advance. It allowed us back home to prepare better and for MacArthur to return. And though the Japanese overran the Philippines in the terrible battles of Corregidor and the famous death march of Bataan, the surviving soldiers were able to harass the Japanese through guerilla work, and they were not strong

enough to resist MacArthur when he returned. In fact, it was the Filipinos, bravely alongside their American counterparts, who helped to win the war in the Pacific.

After the war was over, after we had won in both the Atlantic and Pacific, the Philippines were granted their independence, and the Congress of 1946 said, You got your independence. You take care of your veterans. Yes, you saved America, but that is your problem, not ours anymore.

Although President Truman signed the legislation which embodied that in law, he said, We must repair this important travesty. We promised those veterans full benefits. We have taken them away. We have to go and give them back. That was 62 years ago, Mr. Chairman, and that travesty still burns in the hearts of the Filipinos who are alive, and their family members.

The amendment I have in front of the body says that, basically, We are sorry, but thank you.

It provides a pension for those brave Filipino veterans. This is a moral necessity for America to close the chapter on World War II. This is a moral necessity for this Congress to make up for a mistake that was made 62 years ago.

I know many Members of this body agree with remedying this moral disaster, and yet we have had problems of how

we pay for that and how we somehow use the budget to make sure that we are helping these deserving veterans, while not taking away from our brave young men and women from either World War II, Vietnam, Korea, the Persian Gulf war I or the present conflicts.

So, Mr. Chairman, I am trying to figure out a way to do that. I know the vast majority of this body agrees with me, and I look forward to working with you to find a way to do that.

Ms. PELOSI. I have watched with interest the debate this evening, and I am so proud of the work that you, Mr. Edwards, are doing on this issue to honor America's vets and, Congressman Wamp, you as well.

I thank the chairman of the Veterans' Committee for bringing up this important issue of our Filipino vets. For years we have been pleading our case. Mr. Obey has listened patiently and tried to find a way for us to meet the needs of these people who served our country so well, who helped achieve the victory.

Promises were made; promises were not kept. And I know it is not possible to do something this evening, but I wanted to come to the floor to associate myself with the remarks of our distinguished chairman, Bob Filner, who has worked relentlessly, as we all know, persistently, on this important issue.

We recently had a visit from the President of the Philippines, where she was very interested in the progress of this issue.

So, again, I associate myself with Mr. Filner's impassioned plea on this subject. Thank you for your leadership for our veterans on an ongoing basis. I am very proud of the leadership of this subcommittee. Under the chairman's leadership, we have been able to give the biggest increase in veterans' health funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration, and just recently in the supplemental we were able to have the GI Bill for our veterans, thank you to our veterans, and when they come home we send them to college. Now this bill goes even further.

So I thank you and Mr. Wamp, both of you, for your leadership on this subject, and yield back the time to the distinguished chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and thank him for his leadership on behalf of our veterans, all of our veterans, and in this case at this moment our Filipino vets.